The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Hundreds of Ethnic Germans Are Dying for Russia in Ukraine. This Man Is Tracking Them.

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April 17, 2025

The funeral of Fyodor Guerlain, who died in Ukraine, in the Saratov region. **oskarmaria.de**

Volunteers counting Russia's losses in the war in Ukraine have long pointed to the disproportionate numbers of ethnic minorities among the fallen soldiers.

In addition to communities Indigenous to Russia — such as Buryats and Tyvans — some of the country's non-Indigenous minorities also sustained outsized losses. Among them are at least 1,017 ethnic Germans.

German colonists first settled along the shores of the Volga River in the late 18th century at the invitation of Catherine the Great, who hoped the skilled farmers and merchants persecuted at home would help modernize the Russian Empire.

The group, widely known as the Volga Germans, has faced a turbulent history in Russia. From

the 19th century onwards, they were subjected to forced russification and conscription by the tsarist regime.

The establishment of the Volga German Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924 provided hope for preserving the community's culture, language and a degree of political autonomy, but the project was short-lived. The Soviet government dismantled the Volga German ASSR in 1941 and forcibly deported its inhabitants to Siberia and Kazakhstan.

Andrej Triller, a Germany-based descendant of Volga Germans deported to Kazakhstan, has been documenting the new tragedy hitting his community by tracking Ukraine war losses among the roughly 195,000 Germans remaining in Russia.

The Moscow Times spoke to Triller about his motivation for keeping the casualty count and what his findings reveal about the fate of Russian Germans.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

MT: You have been counting casualties among the Germans fighting for Russia in Ukraine since the start of the full-scale invasion. What prompted you to do that?

AT: I have dedicated my entire life to my people. I've been involved in the movement [for the rights] of Russian Germans since 1991. Back then, we fought for the restoration of the Volga German Republic.

When the full-scale war with Ukraine began, it became yet another tragedy for our people, who are now being used [by Russia] in a confrontation with Europe.

During World War II, Soviet Germans were sent to labor camps instead of the front lines. Many people then said, 'This is unjust, why are we being sent to camps?' But now, Germans are being told: 'Well, here's your chance — go on and fight!'

If you look at the losses among national republics, Bashkortostan has the highest number of casualties per region [with 4,578 losses confirmed by Mediazona volunteers] out of a population of over 4 million. Meanwhile, Germans with fewer than 200,000 people left in Russia have 1,000 deaths.

If we had our own region within Russia, the proportion of losses wouldn't be as high because each Russian region is given a set military requirement quota...But Russian Germans are scattered across the country — from Kaliningrad to Sakhalin — and the list of casualties I maintain reflects that.

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MT: How many regions are represented in your casualty list?

AT: I can tell you...from which regions Russian Germans are predominantly being mobilized: the Altai, Omsk, Krasnoyarsk, Kemerovo, Perm, Chelyabinsk and Sverdlovsk regions. These are the places where Russian Germans were deported to [by Soviet authorities] — including where the Gulag labor camps were located.

In fact, more people were deported there from Ukraine than from the Volga region. It's just more common to speak of the Volga Germans because that's where there was an autonomous republic.

But now, Germans who were once deported from Ukraine are being sent back to Ukraine to capture Ukrainian territories [for Moscow].

MT: What do Germans living in Russia think about your casualty list? Did you get any feedback from them?

I sent information on casualty counts to a chat of Russian Germans — not just a random one, but one with well-known figures in our movement, activists and officials. One woman from Saratov told me, 'That's all fake!' I replied, 'Alright, in the Saratov region, Daniel Falman from the town of Marx was killed — go check for yourself whether that's fake or not.'

MT: Did they say anything else?

Some people also said that this could have a demoralizing effect...I'm doing this deliberately to let potential military volunteers know what awaits them [on the front]. And if someone decides not to go to war and to escape somewhere instead, I'll see that as me having saved a life.

The so-called 'special military operation' is the final blow to the existence of the German diaspora in Russia. Many young conscripts signed military contracts [to join the army] while undergoing compulsory military service. You have to understand that when commanding officers put pressure on a conscript — grab him by the throat, so to speak — he has virtually no chance but to sign that contract.

It bothers me that the Ukrainian press writes a lot about the Buryats, the Kalmyks and other ethnic minorities, and that there's an understanding that these people are going to war not by their own choice. But when it comes to Germans, there's complete silence.

Russian Germans don't have their own republic, and Ukraine realizes that there's no point in inciting resistance among them. They can't stage an uprising in their own region, because they don't have one. And so they're left without attention, without interest.

[To draw attention to this], I recently published an article [on social media] with a provocative title: 'Merkel, Merz, and Fabritius Died in Ukraine.' Of course, everyone thinks those are German politicians, but it is actually about Russian Germans with those same surnames who were killed in Ukraine.

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